



# UNITED STATES SENATE

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## **BROWN, HARRIS, CASEY AND CORTEZ MASTO INTRODUCE COMPREHENSIVE LEGISLATION TO SUPPORT CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES DURING COVID-19**

*Legislation Invests in Health, Safety and Wellbeing of Children, Youth and Families*

*Senators Have Been Pushing For Emergency Funding To Protect Vulnerable Children and Strengthen Families during the COVID-19 Crisis*

Washington, D.C. – Today, U.S. Sens. Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Kamala D. Harris (D-CA), Bob Casey (D-PA) and Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV) introduced the ***Child Welfare Emergency Assistance Act***, comprehensive legislation to provide flexible, emergency aid for key child welfare programs working to support young people and families during the COVID-19 pandemic. The senators’ legislation will help ensure child welfare agencies and organizations are equipped with resources to continue protecting and supporting families during this public health crisis.

**“Youth and families in the child welfare system are experiencing unprecedented financial stress, social isolation, and abrupt changes to daily life,”** said Brown. **“Local child protective services will need additional support to continue meeting the needs of their communities. This legislation will help improve the health, safety, and wellbeing of children, youth, and families by investing in them and the agencies and organizations that support them.”**

**“As our country continues to address the COVID-19 pandemic, we must prioritize the health and safety of children in foster care,”** said Harris. **“I’m proud to join my colleagues in introducing the Child Welfare Emergency Assistance Act– we have a duty to support children, families, and caregivers and ensure they have the resources needed to stay safe.”**

**“The COVID-19 pandemic is causing unintended consequences for children and youth in the child welfare system. As states are facing financial shortfalls due to the public health crisis, we need to ensure that the child welfare system is able to meet the needs of families who are also in crisis,”** said Senator Casey. **“The Child Welfare Emergency Assistance Act would provide funding to ensure families have the support services they need. The bill**

would also ensure teens don't have to worry about aging out of foster care during a public health pandemic. I urge my colleagues to support this critical bill to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our most vulnerable children and youth.”

“Children in the foster care system and those at risk of entering the system are particularly vulnerable to the twin economic and public health crises brought on by COVID-19,” said Senator Cortez Masto. “As the coronavirus pandemic continues to take its toll on state and local budgets across the country, I’m proud to cosponsor legislation that will provide child welfare agencies with the funding and supplies they need to protect investments in vital services for children and their caregivers during this unprecedented time. We have a moral obligation to support children and help keep families together during this crisis.”

**Specifically, the legislation will invest in the health, safety, and wellbeing of children, youth, and families by:**

- **Investing \$2 billion to support state and tribal child welfare agencies in providing families, kinship caregivers, and young people with a broad range of support services**, including assistance for transportation, housing, and utility payments. Child welfare agencies could also use this funding to expand adoption promotion and support services, or to hire, train and support caseworkers to conduct safe in-person home and remote visits, including the purchase of personal protective equipment and technology.
- **Providing \$30 million for kinship navigator programs to ensure kinship caregivers have access to information and resources**, including food, safety supplies, technology, and COVID-19 testing.
- **Dedicating \$50 million to help states implement health oversight and coordination plans** to ensure children in foster care are up-to-date on vaccinations and have access to needed care and telehealth services.
- **Investing \$15 million to states and tribes for training on trauma-informed de-escalation strategies** for child welfare partners, congregate care facilities, and families.
- **Requiring states to develop and implement de-escalation strategies** to limit unnecessary involvement with law enforcement, and ensure any contact with law enforcement is non-coercive.
- **Expediting eligibility for children living with a relative in foster care for federal support**, and allow 100% federal support for kinship caregiver payments through the Title IV-E Guardianship Assistance Program and kinship-related Title IV-E adoption assistance payments.
- **Providing \$500 million for the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program to ensure young people have access to supports**, such as housing, food, and cash assistance, and allow more of these funds to cover housing costs for foster youth. Funds could also be used for education and training vouchers, which help young people cover the cost of education.
- **Establishing a moratorium on “aging out” of foster care** to ensure no young person is cut off from critical housing and support services during the public health emergency.

**The legislation will also increase support for services to prevent foster care and the ability of courts to serve families by:**

- **Increasing federal support to provide Title IV-E prevention services**, such as parent training, family counseling, and substance use disorder treatment.
- **Providing \$30 million for the Court Improvement Program** to ensure dependency courts have resources to facilitate the transition to remote hearings, train judges, volunteers, and court personnel on the use of technology, and support innovative programs to help families continue to address case plan requirements.

A number of organizations are supporting the *Child Welfare Emergency Assistance Act*, including the Child Welfare League of America, Children’s Defense Fund, American Academy of Pediatrics, Generations United, National Center for Housing & Child Welfare, ACTION Ohio, OHIO Youth Advisory Board, Ohio Grandparent Kinship Coalition, and the Ohio Federation for Health Equity and Social Justice and FosterClub.

**“Sen. Brown offers a desperately needed lifeline to families and young adults struggling in the face of covid-19,”** said Ruth White, executive director of the National Center for Housing and Child Welfare. **“The comprehensive nature of the bill is evidence that Sen. Brown recognizes and honors the complex work of child welfare professionals. The Child Welfare Emergency Assistance Act funds a full-range of tools workers can use to keep our friends and neighbors safe during this tumultuous time.”**

**“As our country continues to face the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever to ensure children and families in or at risk of entering the child welfare system have the support they need. The health crisis has placed tremendous stress on families and has created unique challenges for the child welfare system, making a swift, proactive approach to provide families with effective resources and services vital. The *Child Welfare Emergency Assistance Act of 2020* is comprehensive legislation that will ensure the child welfare system is equipped to support families, prevent unnecessary foster care, and meet children’s health needs, especially during this tumultuous time. The American Academy of Pediatrics thanks Senator Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) for his leadership on this legislation and is urging for its swift passage,”** said American Academy of Pediatrics CEO/Executive Vice President Mark Del Monte, JD.

**“The Children’s Defense Fund is proud to support Senator Brown’s Child Welfare Emergency Assistance Act. Our nation’s most vulnerable children and families need support to face the unprecedented challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly children and families of color who are disproportionately impacted by both the pandemic and systemic racism in the child welfare system. This bill would bolster critical supports for children, youth and families across the entire child welfare continuum, from strengthening families to keeping children safe to addressing the needs of those already involved in the child welfare system. This legislation is an important step toward protecting children and strengthening families,”** said Stefanie Sprow, Director of Child Welfare Policy, Children’s Defense Fund

**“Families where children are being raised by grandparents or other relatives are especially hard hit by COVID-19. The caregivers are more likely to be older and at higher risk of incapacitating illness or death if exposed,”** Donna Butts, executive director of Generations United. **“While older adults are told to isolate, this isn’t possible when you live in a grandfamily as more than 2.5 million children currently do. In many cases relatives are the last option to keep the children out of foster care. This legislation takes critical steps to support the families and help our country’s children thrive.”**

**“Sen. Brown’s efforts to seek out and understand the experience of current and former foster youth like myself, throughout the state of Ohio in the face of this pandemic is evident throughout the Child Welfare Emergency Assistance Act,”** said Cloé Cooper of ACTION Ohio. **“More often than not, we have nobody in our corner – and during the economic and health crisis this can prove deadly. I am proud to be an Ohioan where people like Senator Brown and his team are champions for young people like myself and include our voices in their policy-making.”**

In May, Brown [joined his colleagues in introducing](#) the *Emergency Funding for Child Protection Act*, which would provide \$500 million in emergency funds for local child protective services and \$1 billion for community-based child abuse prevention programs. The funds for these local child protective services and community based programs are flexible, and can be used to target populations that have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, including racial and ethnic minorities, children with disabilities, families experiencing domestic violence or homelessness, and LGBTQ youth.

Brown also introduced the [Pandemic TANF Assistance Act](#), which would establish a new \$10 billion Coronavirus Emergency Assistance Grant program to help low-income families and individuals experiencing significant financial hardship during the COVID-19 pandemic. Emergency Assistance Grants would allow states, territories and tribes to provide eligible families short-term cash, non-cash and in-kind assistance to help address their basic needs, prevent household emergencies like foreclosure, forfeiture, and termination of utilities, and avoid children needing to be removed from their homes.

Brown [urged the Trump Administration](#) in March to issue national guidance for child welfare agencies who must still work to protect and support children during the COVID-19 outbreak. In a [letter](#) sent to Vice President Mike Pence and Administration on Children, Youth and Families Commissioner Elizabeth Darling, Brown urged the Administration to issue comprehensive guidance to states and tribes to ensure youth have access to the full range of support services required to meet their educational, health, and housing needs, regardless of where they live.

In April, Brown joined his colleagues in a [letter](#) to Senate leadership urging them to ensure the next COVID-19 relief package provides crucial support to some of America’s most vulnerable children, youth, and families by equipping the child welfare system with the tools it needs to handle this crisis.

**Read more about the *Child Welfare Emergency Assistance Act* [here](#).**

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